

International Journal of Internet Science
2014, 9 (1), 64–71. Non-peer-reviewed supplement.

ISSN 1662-5544



Innovation and quality in web-based data collection



Supported by



Acknowledgement: The authors would like to acknowledge networking support by the COST Action IS1004.



The word cloud is based on content from the network's website at <http://webdatanet.eu/>

A short history of WEBDATANET

In light of the growing importance of web-based data in the social and behavioral sciences, WEBDATANET was established in 2011 as a COST Action (IS 1004) to create a multidisciplinary network of web-based data collection experts: (web) survey methodologists, psychologists, sociologists, linguists, economists, Internet scientists, media and public opinion researchers. The aim was to accumulate and synthesize knowledge regarding methodological issues of web-based data collection (surveys, experiments, tests, non-reactive data, and mobile Internet research), and foster its scientific usage in a broader community.



Dissemination activity, Barcelona, 2014

In the last three years WEBDATANET has grown into a multidisciplinary European network, which brings together more than 190 leading web-based data collection experts, from 30 countries of the European Union and abroad. Through its activities (conferences, workshops, training schools and short-term scientific missions) it has established a unique research forum, which contributes to the theoretical and empirical foundations of web-based data collection and enhances the integrity and legitimacy of these new forms of data collection. WEBDATANET has fostered the development of innovative research agendas and the drafting of cross-national research proposals. The network has also actively promoted the use of web-based data by supplying web-based teaching and discussion platforms and research exchanges.



WEBDATANET members who attended the Cyprus meeting in Larnaca in 2014

Being innovative through cooperation & mobilization

Given the increased competition among scientific disciplines and research areas regarding innovative contributions, WEBDATANET provides the scientific community with a collaboration platform where current challenges and innovative ideas for web-based data collection can be exchanged, discussed and developed. Moreover, its multidisciplinary framework bundles expertise in a unique way.

In order to provide such a cooperation framework, the scientific scope of WEBDATANET is divided into three broad research themes emerging as important areas in the field of web-based data collection. For each theme, one working group (WG) was established, more information about WG topics can be found [on the website](#). The three research themes are ‘Quality issues of web surveys’ (WG1), ‘Innovations in web-based data collection’ (WG2), and ‘Guidelines, codes, standards, implementation and dissemination’ (WG3). Each WG can create task forces (TFs) and/or small groups (SGs) working towards a specific output stated in the original WEBDATANET proposal and the [Memorandum of Understanding](#).

Throughout the last three years WEBDATANET has established 28 TFs and 5 SGs. The work of some of the TFs has already been completed, while others are still demonstrating the huge variety of expertise within the network and the focus on up-to-date collaborations. The newest TFs concern topics such as mobile research (TF19), paradata (TF20) and the use of web-data/big data for applied economics (TF25).

WG1: QUALITY	WG2: INNOVATIONS	WG3: IMPLEMENTATION	ORGANISATIONAL & OTHER TFs SGs
TF1: Challenges and pitfalls of measuring wages via web surveys – some explorations on weighting TF2: Evaluation of questionnaire quality TF3: Web surveys and mixed modes in representative samples TF4: Internet panels in Europe TF24: Experiments on students samples TF 30: Using Internet panels in public opinion research	TF6: New types of measurement TF7: Informing web surveyors: Webdatametrics workshops TF9: Improvement of iScience portals TF15: Web data collection from non-reactive sources TF19: Mobile research TF20: Paradata TF22: Pilot study to examine the potential of Twitter and Facebook in the election year 2013 in Germany (PEP-TF) TF29: Media metrics and web-data SG1: Social desirability SG2: Dynamic text fields SG3: Two-dimensional scaling Finished: TF5: Organization workshop Bergamo TF8: Dissemination of WG2 findings	TF10: General framework for error categorization in Internet surveys TF11: How web-based data collection is changing the empirical (social science) research TF12: Webdatametrics Master Academic Board TF16: Selecting surveys and implementation guidelines TF 17: Going towards integrated web data collection in official statistics? TF 21: GenPopWeb: Using the web to survey the general population TF25: Web data, digital data and applied economics	TF13: WebSM improvement TF14: Development & supervision Website TF23: WebDataNet Long-Term Strategy TF26: Webdata journal TF 27: Organization Greece meeting TF 28: Organization Salamanca conference Finished: TF18: Organization Iceland meeting SG5: Organization Ljubljana Training School

WEBDATANET structure with WGs, TFs and SGs in 2014

What has been achieved

Within the framework of WEBDATANET different forms of collaboration are encouraged and supported, such as meetings, conferences, short term scientific missions, workshops and other forms of outreach activities. During the last three years, among other events, WEBDATANET has organized or supported the organization of:

- 2 WEBDATANET conferences as well as 24 conference sessions at the European Congress of Methodology (EAM), Conference of the European Survey Research Association (ESRA) and the International Conference on Social Science Methodology (RC33);
- 7 MC-WG-TF-SG meetings;
- 10 workshops on topics such as ‘Big Data’, ‘Weighting’ and ‘Non-reactive data’;
- 1 Training School on implementing high-quality web surveys;
- 19 Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) of individual researchers to ensure mobility and close collaboration among them—in particular Early Stage Researchers. The topics covered demonstrate again the range of expertise distributed among the WEBDATANET community.

Some STSM impressions & experiences:

Tim Kuhlmann (*PhD student, University of Konstanz, Germany*)

STSM on **WEBDATA in Health Psychology** at the Universidad de Deusto, Spain



“The STSM allowed me to discuss methodological details of the online lifestyle intervention we were developing

at the time, as well as to elaborate on further ideas concerning collected data and new experiments. The short visit not only helped in developing and finalizing the existing projects, it also provided a great opportunity to discuss future research topics. WEBDATANET gives researchers from different countries the opportunity to collaborate in-depth. Without funding from WEBDATANET this research visit and its follow-up of a number of current studies and papers would not have been possible. The research visit also paved the way for my current position in the new [iScience research group at the University of Konstanz](#).”

Anže Sendelbah
(*PhD student, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*)

STSM on **Web survey paradata: evaluation of current implementations and potentials** at the NatCen Social Research, UK



“My STSM has supplied me with additional know-how on how to approach my research problems. Furthermore, I also got access to rich survey and paradata datasets that will be valuable to test my hypotheses. I think WEBDATANET provides a great opportunity for formal and informal linking, collaborating and communicating with different experts on web-based data collection.”

Dr. Melanie Revilla (*Post-doc researcher, University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain*)

STSM on **Representativeness of the ELIPSS online panel and added value of including respondents with no previous Internet access** at the Socio-Political Data Centre (CDSP), Paris



“The STSM gave me an opportunity to start working on a topic with which I was not so familiar, with the help of the researchers from the host institution. Once I went back to my university; I was then able to continue on my own much more easily. I think the main strength of WEBDATANET is its diversity: it is multidisciplinary, you can find members from different areas of research related to web data and from many different countries, some are well-known experts in the field and others are early stage researchers, and in WEBDATANET all these people work together in a very stimulating environment.”

As dissemination of knowledge is a core task of WEBDATANET, we have distributed our results and findings through different activities and channels, among them:

- 5 books, 15 book chapters, 45 published articles and 23 submitted articles
- 7 [WEBDATANET-AIAS Working papers](#)
- Several presentations for the promotion of WEBDATANET at the [8th IZA/World Bank Conference \(IZA, Bonn, Germany\)](#), the [2nd Open Economics International Workshop \(MIT, Boston, USA\)](#) as well as the GOR (Mannheim & Cologne, Germany).

For more information about WEBDATANET publications and dissemination activities, please click [here](#).

Moreover, we have supported the continuation of cooperation between WEBDATANET members through the participation in

- 32 calls for proposals at the national and international level;
- 22 of which have been accepted and 10 are still pending.

WEBDATANET did not only actively contribute to the discussion within the academic community, but also established cooperation with private enterprises (such as Google, TNS, Net Metrix, Global Market Insite), official and public institutions (such as Statistic Austria, Statistic UK, Statistic Netherlands, FORS, GESIS) and European and International institutions (such as the Worldbank, ILO, Eurofound) to exchange knowledge and expertise and bridge the divide between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’.



WEBDATANET MC meeting in Mannheim, 2013

Interview with
WEBDATANET
collaborator Prof. Edith
de Leeuw (University of
Utrecht, The Netherlands)

**Edith, what do you
think is the strength of
WEBDATANET**

It is an international
group of both beginning and advanced
researchers interacting regularly. Moreover
it offers opportunities to meet face to face
to develop and exchange ideas and discuss
working papers.

**How does WEBDATANET support or
has supported your own research?**



It is a stimulating environment that encourages new ideas and gives me support.

What is the contribution of WEBDATANET for the community of web-based data collection researchers?

It offering an effective communication platform and it supports young researchers by giving them chances for international cooperation

What is the future of WEBDATANET?

It would be great if this cooperation could be continued after the current grant period. However, the present contacts and cooperation between researchers in WEBDATANET will certainly continue to the benefit of all!

Thank you for your time!



Participants of the WEBDATAMETRICS workshop in Bergamo, 2013

Looking ahead – what does the future look like?

WEBDATANET will continue working on the issues described above until June 2015. In the up-coming months several activities are planned:

• 8th MC-WG-TF MEETING

The next MC-WG-TF meeting will take place from **September 29th to October 1st of 2014** in Alexandroupolis, Greece. The main purpose of this meeting will be to offer TFs and SGs the opportunity to further prepare the up-coming general

conference. Moreover, the MC will take decisions about the organization of the General Conference (for more information, see the [programme](#)).

• 2nd TRAINING SCHOOL on PARADATA

The 2nd training school will take place from **October 1st to 3rd, 2014** in Alexandroupolis, Greece. It will provide trainees with theoretical and practical knowledge on Web survey paradata. It will offer answers to the following three questions: i) what kind of information can we derive from web survey paradata? ii) how can we collect this information? and iii) how can we use this information? The training school is tailored to the needs of researchers from across Europe wanting to learn how they can collect and analyze web survey paradata and who wish to apply this knowledge by visiting one of the WEBDATANET partners producing web survey paradata (for more information, see the [programme](#)).

• WEBDATANET GENERAL CONFERENCE

The biggest WEBDATANET event will take place in Salamanca, Spain, from **26th to 28th of May, 2015**. It aims to bring together researchers and experts from throughout the world to exchange research on topics related to web-based data collection and analysis methods. The call for sessions is now open and will close on **August 20th, 2014** (for more information, see the [call for sessions](#)).



• **MASTER in WEBDATAMETRICS**

The *Master in Webdatametrics– web based data collection and analysis*–offers a top quality programme in the area of Internet-based data collection methods and Big Data analysis. The Webdatametrics concept emerges from the existing diverse variety of disciplines related to web data collection methods and analyses. Putting this knowledge together, Webdatametrics students will generate new knowledge and take advantage of information and communication technologies to collect data for scientific and business purposes. The first Master edition will start in **September 2015** (more information about the Master can be found [here](#)).



Interested in joining?

WEBDATANET encourages people who are involved and interested in web-based data collection to join the Action. Participants of WEBDATANET are:

- senior/junior researchers and university students in the field of web-based data collection as well as academic research institutes involved in the coordination of European and worldwide surveys;
- commercial market research and public opinion agencies;
- governmental agencies and institutions carrying out web surveys;

- international and national public policy-makers.

Although there are specific rules and requirements on how to become a member of the Action, participation is rather easy to achieve. For more information about the network, please visit our homepage:

<http://webdatanet.eu/>



Connect with us on [LinkedIn](#)



Like us on [Facebook](#)



Follow us on [Twitter](#): [@WebdatanetCOST](#)

Or contact us directly:

Mr. Fernando Pinto Hernández

(Scientific & financial administrator)

University of Salamanca, Spain

Email: pintoyhernandez@gmail.com

Dr. Pablo DE PEDRAZA (Action chair)

University of Salamanca, Spain

Email: pablodepedraza@usal.es

Dr. Stephanie STEINMETZ (Action vice chair)

University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Email: s.m.steinmetz@uva.nl

WG 1 chair & vice chair

Dr. Katja Lozar Manfreda
(Katja.Lozar@fdv.uni-lj.si)

Dr. Gudbjörg Andrea Jonsdottir
(gudbjorg@hi.is)

WG 2 chair & vice chair

Prof. Dr. Ulf-Dietrich Reips (reips@uni-konstanz.de)

Dr. Kathrin Kissau
(kathrin.kissau@gmail.com)

WG 3 chair & vice chair

Prof. Dr. Silvia Biffignandi
(silvia.biffignandi@unibg.it)

Dr. Fanney Thorsdottir (fanneyt@hi.is)